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Submission to the Senate committee reviewing the

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012.

In connection with the proposed bilateral agreements with states over the EPBC Act, our membership, the Logan and Albert Conservation Association (LACA), believes that conservative state governments are clearly pursuing ideological objectives when they call for reductions in Federal Government involvement in environmental issues. Ideologies come and go, but environmental issues are growing and need to be treated with great seriousness and not be allowed to become part of an ideological chess game.

The conservative states are laying the blueprint for an Abbott reconstruction of Australian Government along the lines of the UK 'Big Society', which, through austerity measures, devolves government progressively down to local regions and hands much of the management of our key institutions to corporations. This would be highly undesirable and un-Australian, utterly unnecessary for a successful economy such as ours, and catastrophic for the environment.

Short-sighted development proposals, supported by the states, have threatened Australia's natural heritage many times in the past. A healthy environment is essential to the Australian way of life. Due to poor State laws and lack of effective compliance processes, our environmental assets are in a state of decline. We need stronger environmental laws, not weaker ones.

For the current Federal Government to devolve the EPBC assessment process down to the state level at the same time as the conservative states are busy dismantling and de-powering their environment departments would be short-sighted in the extreme, and would bring to an abrupt end the fine record of wise Federal interventions in key environmental issues, such as Fraser Island, The Wet Tropics and Franklin River – all of which

have been recognised around the world as proud moments in Australia's history.

Strong environmental laws safeguard our way of life. They protect our land and wildlife and ensure that our air and water are not polluted by destructive development.

Our membership is deeply concerned that under pressure from industry, conservative state governments are vigorously pursuing aggressive plans to wind back the critical environmental protection laws that safeguard our land, water and wildlife, and the Bilateral Agreement proposals relating to the EPBC are a significant part of this. Faced with this, the Federal government must not abdicate from its responsibility to continue playing a critical role in protecting matters of national environmental significance.

We call on you to <u>reject</u> the proposals laid out in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda that would fast-track the transfer of federal approval powers to state governments, wind back the Environmental Protection, Biodiversity and Conservation Act and allow states and territories to fast-track environmentally damaging development projects.

Yours sincerely

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Since its inception in 1989, LACA has worked with our community, council, industry, and government to develop understanding, commitment and actions for more sustainable living in the areas of Logan City Council and Scenic Rim Regional Council in South-east Queensland .
LACA aims...

- *To play an active role in the protection and enhancement of the environment.*
- *To promote the concept of environmental sustainability as an essential criterion of planning for development.*
- *To educate and inform the community on all aspects of conservation.*
- *To research and report on current and proposed activities likely to affect the local environment*
- *.To encourage the widest possible public consultation and informed debate on matters of conservation and environmental importance to the local community*